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66TH SAARC LITERATURE FESTIVAL BEGINS TODAY, WITHOUT PAKISTAN

The four-day festival in New Delhi will see a mix of poetry, fiction and academic papers featuring celebrated voices from South Asia

'PAK WRITERS BARRED TILL TERRORISM STOPS'

The literature festival, organised by the Foundation of SAARC Writers and Literature (FOSWAL), is hosting writers and scholars from all SAARC countries except Pakistan. Punjabi writer and president of FOSWAL Ajeet Cour said Pakistan's participation in this edition is a "political issue", and the organisers "cannot invite Pakistani writers till terrorism stops"

CROSS-BORDER CULTURAL EXCHANGES

- The festival will begin with an inaugural session by Sahitya Akademi president Madhav Kaushik, scholar Ashis Nandy, and diplomats of the seven countries that are participating in this year's event
- Established in 1986, FOSWAL has organised cross-border cultural exchange through conferences, festivals, and youth outreach fetes

Nov 12

IS WHEN THE FESTIVAL WILL COME TO A CLOSE

CHENNAI ▪ MADURAI ▪ VIJAYAWADA ▪ BENGALURU ▪ KOCHI ▪ HYDERABAD ▪ VISAKHAPATNAM ▪ COIMBATORE ▪ KOZHIKODE ▪ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM ▪ BELAGAVI ▪ BHUBANESWAR ▪ SHIVAMOGGA ▪ MANGALURU ▪ TIRUPATI ▪ TIRUCHY ▪ TIRUNELVELI ▪ SAMBALPUR ▪ HUBBALLI ▪ DHARMAPURI ▪ KOTTAYAM ▪ KANNUR ▪ VILLUPURAM ▪ KOLLAM ▪ TADEPALLIGUDEM ▪ NAGAPATTINAM ▪ THRISSUR ▪ KALABURAGI

YOUNG KARNATAKA SHINES
Four-page special feature on the 4th Mini Karnataka Games, a week-long sporting extravaganza showcasing the state's under-14 talent, with this edition

Gruha Lakshmi beneficiaries can soon get up to ₹3 lakh loan

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Belagavi

IN a major move aimed at empowering women economically, Karnataka's flagship Gruha Lakshmi scheme, which has already benefited millions of women across the state, is set to gain a new dimension. Along with the existing monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,000, beneficiaries will now be eligible for low-interest loans of up to Rs 3 lakh, announced Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar, here on Saturday.

The new initiative – Gruha Lakshmi Multipurpose Cooperative Society – will officially be launched on November 19 at a grand ceremony at Bengaluru's Kanteerava Stadium. "We have successfully implemented Gruha Lakshmi, one of the world's largest social welfare programmes. To further empower its beneficiaries, we are now introducing this cooperative society," Hebbalkar said.

Through this society, Gruha Lakshmi beneficiaries can avail loans of up to Rs 3 lakh at interest rates lower than the market rate to start small businesses, pursue self-employment, or meet emergencies. P6

DIFFERENT STROKES

CASUAL VS DILIGENT ON ROPING IN MANJHI

DASHRATH Manjhi's new house has a visitor. A surprise political visitor. Not the one you would have expected if you knew the prequel to this story. But it's the sequel that can contain clues to the difference between India's two national parties. Yes, the man who moved mountains in life can move politics even in death—though not as much as he would have liked.

Who's Dashrath Manjhi? For those who somehow missed out, he's the man who cut through a mountain all on his own, with a hammer and chisel, over 22 years.

His wife had died because medical care was 70 km away by road, though just over the mountain in reality. He swore that such a fate should never befall anyone again. And kept his word. Town is now just a kilometre away from his Gehlaur village.

SANTWANA BHATTACHARYA
EDITOR

He was feted belatedly as the 'Mountain Man', a postage stamp was issued in his name, films were made about his life—a documentary, a Hindi movie, even a couple of Kannada films.

But the destitution had not changed. When Dashrath died, in 2007, home was still a thatched-roof hut. The lot of many among his 'Mahadalit' community of Musahars, and millions of others in Bihar.

Then came Rahul Gandhi. It was revealed a few months ago that the Congress leader had quietly — without any fanfare or publicity, without even being asked — sponsored a five-room pucca house for the Manjhi family. Media briefly hailed the Good Samaritan act, then forgot all about it.

Bihar had much more compelling business to attend to. There was the SIR, Rahul's own yatra in the run-up to a hotly contested assembly election.

A sidelight there was that Rahul had come visiting Gehlaur again. Bhagirath Manjhi, Dashrath's sixty-something son, was the one who had invited him for his first visit. That time Bhagirath had not asked for any favour. This time he did. He wanted a Congress ticket to contest the election. Rahul assured him one.

It made eminent sense too. The Congress was now speaking up for Dalit rights with a new force. What better way to illustrate it than to have Dashrath's son contesting under its flag?

Come candidate selection time, Bhagirath went to Delhi, camped for four days. What came next was the usual Congress self-goal. Party apparatchiks denied him a ticket.

When we visit Gehlaur, along the road that Dashrath built, this new pucca house — as we said — has a visitor. It's an "MLA from Chhattisgarh". Some tangible discomfort at encountering us, and a hasty exit ensued.

CONTINUED ON: P10

POCSO

21-YR-OLD MAN RAPES MINOR SISTER FOR MONTHS IN KOPPAL

The accused, a resident of Koppal, forced his sister into a physical relationship by threatening to commit suicide if she did not relent. The incident came to light when the girl delivered a child last month | P3

The 35th edition of Devi Awards, organised by The New Indian Express, honoured 11 trailblazing women achievers in Bengaluru on Saturday. (Top row from left) Divya Raghavendra Rao; Kalpana Sonthalia, wife of Chairman & Managing Director, EPMPL, Manoj Kumar Sonthalia; Nooraine Fazal; TNIE Editorial Director Prabhu Chawla; Veda Krishnamurthy; Pragati Mathur; Deputy Resident Editor Nirad Mudur; Shraddha Srinath, and Chayaa Nanjappa; (Bottom row from left) TNIE CEO Lakshmi Menon; Sahar Mansoor, Mayura Balasubramanian, Chief Guest Kris Gopalakrishnan; Neha, Director, Event Express; TNIE Editor Santwana Bhattacharya; Hema Ravichander; Anita Nair; and Deepthi Bopaiah | KEVIN NASHON

We must create conditions for women to lead: Kris

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

"IF we want to achieve our vision of Viksit Bharat, we must create the conditions for women to work, lead and thrive. To do this, we need safe, inclusive, and enabling workplaces where women can perform without fear or bias," said Kris Gopalakrishnan, Chairman, Axilor Ventures.

He was speaking at the 35th edition of the Devi Awards organised by *The New Indian Express* here on Saturday. On the occasion, 11 women achievers from diverse fields, were honoured.

"While we celebrate the extraordinary achievements of our Devi Award winners, we must recognise a national challenge -- India needs more women in the workforce," Gopalakrishnan said.

"Women's economic participation is not just a question of fairness, it is a question of national strength and growth," the visionary technocrat noted.

Comparing India's women workforce with that of China, he said, "In China, nearly 60% of women participate in the labour force, one of the highest rates in the world. Women there are a major driving force in manufacturing, technology and entrepreneurship. Their contribution, I believe, has been a key factor in China's rapid economic rise."

In contrast, India's female labour force participation rate remains below 30%, he lamented. CONTINUED ON: P2

Uproar over Umesh Reddy, terrorist using phone in jail

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

BENGALURU Central Prison authorities are again in the dock after photographs and videos of inmates using mobile phones and receiving preferential treatment went viral.

A video grab of Umesh Reddy using a phone in Central Prison

This time, the photos and videos allegedly show suspected terror operative Zuhab Hameed Shakeel Manna and convicted serial rapist and killer Umesh Reddy using mobile phones and watching TV inside the prison.

In the video, Umesh Reddy is seen wearing coloured clothes and using a mobile phone inside his cell, while he is expected to wear prison-issued clothes as he is a convict. There is definitely no provision for him to use the mobile phone. He was also allegedly allowed to cook for himself. CONTINUED ON: P3

BIHAR, SIR TO DOMINATE DEC 1-19 WINTER SESSION

Opposition hits out at govt over short session of Parliament

DECIDE

KEY BILLS

Among the bills likely to be taken up are the Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill, 2025, the J&K Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, which proposes the removal of top government functionaries under arrest for 30 days

PREETHA NAIR @ New Delhi

THE outcome of Bihar's assembly elections is expected to dominate the the Winter Session of Parliament, which will be held from December 1 to 19.

The Opposition is also planning to up the ante on the nationwide Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and the alleged vote theft in Haryana and Maharashtra. Though there is no joint Opposition strategy on SIR so far, Opposition-ruled states Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Kerala have intensified their protest against the exercise. All parties will come together to oppose the SIR during the session, said an Opposition leader.

Speaking to the media, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said that the key issue will be the SIR. "The Prime Minister's silence on Trump's statements is a major issue. The current relationship with China is unresolved... There hasn't been a border agreement with China. We haven't returned to the previous situation. Negotiations are being held between the two countries based on the new normal that China has established. Besides, there are many such issues regarding the rate of economic growth, GDP, unemployment. There is no shortage of issues. We keep issuing notices again and again, but no action is ever taken on them. The government does whatever it wants," Ramesh said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra addressing poll rallies in Bihar on Saturday | PTI

This session is set to be one of the shortest since 2014. The previous winter session ran from November 25 to December 20. Opposition parties rapped the government for 'curtailed' session. Ramesh said the session is "an unusually delayed and truncated one". "It will be just 15 working days. What is the message being conveyed? Clearly, the government has no business to transact, no Bills to get passed, and no debates to be allowed."

Echoing the view, TMC leader Derek O'Brien said the government is avoiding parliamentary scrutiny. "15-day Winter Session announced. Setting dubious records. Parliament-ophobia. PM Narendra Modi and team continue to suffer from the acute condition called Parliament-ophobia, a morbid fear of facing Parliament," he wrote on X. The last session of Parliament had as many as 21 sittings spread over 32 days, during which 12 bills were passed by the Lok Sabha and 15 by the Rajya Sabha.

Canada got intel on Nijjar's killing from UK: Report

NEW DELHI: A new documentary has claimed that British spy call intercepts helped Canada draw alleged links between India and the 2023 killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

'Inside the Deaths that Rocked India's Relations with the West', produced by Bloomberg Originals, reports that the UK's Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) intercepted conversations mentioning three individuals — including Nijjar, who was declared a terrorist by India in 2020. The intelligence was allegedly shared with Canada under the Five Eyes alliance of the UK, US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Hardeep Singh Nijjar

According to the documentary, British intelligence provided Ottawa with a sensitive file in July 2023, hand-delivered and restricted to a few pre-approved officials. The intercepted calls were reportedly between individuals believed to be working for the Indian government and referred to three "targets" — Nijjar, British activist Avtar Singh Khanda, and US-based Gurpatwant Singh Pannun — followed by discussions suggesting Nijjar's "elimination."

India has rejected Canadian allegations as 'absurd and motivated'. *PTI*

ROAD TO SAINTHOOD

Kerala's first Catholic nun, Mother Eliswa, beatified

Oswald Cardinal Gracias (R) unveils the devotional image of Mother Eliswa in Kochi as Cardinal Sebastian Francis and Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli look on | TP SOORAJ

ANNA JOSE @ Kochi

IN a long-awaited moment for the sisters of the Congregation of the Teresian Carmelites and the residents of Ochanthuruth village in Kerala's Ernakulam, thousands of faithful gathered on Saturday at the Vallarpadam Basilica to witness the beatification of Mother Eliswa, the first nun of the Catholic Church in Kerala.

Cardinal Sebastian Francis, special representative of Pope Leo XIV and bishop of Penang, Malaysia, officially proclaimed Mother Eliswa as blessed. The cardinal read out the declaration issued by the pontiff in Latin.

In his entreaty, the metropolitan of Verapoly archdiocese, Joseph Kalathiparambil, said, "Mother Eliswa's holy, courageous, and unwavering life of faith and love will be an inspiration to many."

Speaking after the proclamation, Cardinal Sebastian said, "So today, with immense joy and gratitude, we rejoice to witness this historic moment for the global Carmelite family, for the archdiocese of Verapoly, for the church of Kerala, for India, for Asia, and for the universal church."

The bells of the church were rung as the cardinal announced the beatification. Cardinal Dr Oswald Gracias unveiled the image of Blessed Mother Eliswa. And, her relics were placed on the altar.

Eliswa was declared a servant of God in March 2008 and was proclaimed venerable in November 2023. On April 14, 2025, Pope Francis approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Mother Eliswa.

Born on October 15, 1831, Eliswa was the first of eight children of Thomman and Thanda, of the Vyppissery Capithan family of Ochanthuruth.